international institute of social history

Emma Goldman Papers

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Dear Dr. Hirschfeld:

I have been familiar with your great work on sex psychology for a number of years. I have admired the brave struggle you have made for the rights of people who, by their very nature, can not find sex expression in what is commonly called "the normal way". And now that I have been fortunate enough to know you and see your efforts at close range, I am more than ever impressed with your personality and the spirit which has sustained you in your difficult task. Your readiness to give my refutation of Frhr. von Levetzow's appraisement of Louise Michel as an Uranier in your Jahrbuch Bd. XI proves, if proofs were needed, that you have a fine sense of justice which seeks only to ascertain the truth. I thank you for that and for your able and heroic stand you have taken against ignorance and hypocrisy on behalf of light and humanism.

Before I deal with von Levetzow's article, permit me to say this: It is not prejudice against homosexuality or the aversion to homosexuals which prompts me to point out the errors in the claim of the author. If Louise Michel had ever demonstrated same sexual traits to those who knew and loved her, I should be the last person to attempt to clear her from the "stigma". I may, indeed, consider it a tragedy for those who are sexually differentiated in a world so bereft of understanding for the homosexual, or so ignorant of the meaning and importance of the whole gamut of sex. But I certainly do not think such people inferior, less moral, or less capable of fine feelings and actions. Least of all should I consider it necessary to "clear" my illustrious teacher and comrade, Louise Michel, of the charge of homosexuality. Her value to humanity, her contribution to the emancipation of ~~all xxx~~ the slaves, is so great that nothing could add or detract from her, whatever her sexual gratifications may have been.

Years ago, when I knew nothing at all about sex psychology, and when my only acquaintance with homosexuals were some of the women I had met in prison where I was incarcerated for my political opinions, I came out in defense of Oscar Wilde. As an Anarchist, my place has ever been with the persecuted. I saw in the persecution and prosecution of Oscar Wilde reflected the cruel injustice and hypocrisy of the very society which sent him to his doom. Hence my defense of him.

Later, I went to Europe, and there came upon the works of Havelock Ellis, Krafft Ebbing, Carpenter, and many others which made me see the crime against Oscar Wilde and, ~~this time~~ beyond, in a more glaring light. From that time on I used my pen and voice in behalf of those whom nature, herself, has destined to be different in their sex psychology and needs. Your works, Dear Doctor, have helped me much in shedding light on the very complex question of sex psychology, and in humanising the attitude of people who came to hear me.

From this, your readers will see that I have no prejudice whatever, or the least antipathy, to homosexuals. Quite to the contrary. I have among my friends men and women either complete Urnings or Bi-Sexuals. I have found them far above the ~~others~~ average in intelligence, ability, sensitiveness and charm. I feel deeply with them, because I know that their sufferings are greater and more complex than that of most people. There is, however, one predominant tendency among homosexuals which I must oppose. It is their attempt to claim every outstanding personality for their creed, to ascribe to them traits and characteristics inherent in themselves.

Now, it may be psychologically conditioned in all persecuted peoples to cling for support to the exceptional types of every period. Misery ever seeks companionship. Thus, for instance, the Jews will have it that most great men and women in the world ~~has~~ have ever ~~been~~ been either of Jewish origin or have Jewish characteristics. The Irish will do the same. The Hindus will tell you that their civilization is the greatest in the world. And so on and so forth. It is the same with political outcasts; Socialists claim Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde for the theories of Marx, while many Anarchists will

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point to Nietzche, Wagner, Ibsen and others as to their very own. To be sure, greatness always goes with versatility, but I have always considered it an imposition to lay claim upon any great creative person for my ideas, unless he or she so claims themselves.

If one is to accept the contention of many homosexuals for granted, one would have to come to the conclusion that there was or can no be greatness outside of sexually inverted people. Persecution breeds sectarianism; this, in return, makes people limited in their scope, and very often unfair in their appraisement of others. I rather think that Frhr. Karl von Levetzow suffers from an overdose of homosexual sectarianism. Added to this is his antiquated view towards the female. He sees in woman only the charmer of man, the bearer of children, and, in a more vulgar sense, the general cook and bottle-washer of the household. Any woman who lacks these time-worn requisites for feminity, the author will immediately claim as an Uranian. In the light of modern woman's achievements in every domain of human thought and social endeavor, this view of the conventional male towards the female hardly merits a moments consideration. Still, I shall have to deal with this hoary attitude of the author of "Louise Michel", if only to demonstrate the absurd conclusions one may come to if he starts from an absurd premise.

My criticism of von Levetzow' does not prevent me from paying him tribute as a great literary artist and a man capable of sympathetic understanding of a great soul. In fact, I feel somewhat guilty to have to dissect the article. It is as if I attempted to slice up a great, radiant portrait painted by a master hand; for von Levetzow's pen-picture of Louise Michel is a masterpiece. For that, all of us who knew and loved this marvellous woman, are greatly indebted to him. However, the truth demands that I set my own feelings aside and deal with facts.

To deal adequately with the points raised in the article it would necessitate to publish the text in full, together with my reply, or at least to quote at great length, and then take up each point in detail. That, however, would take up too much space of your valuable "Jahrbuch". I will, therefore, content myself with a mere gist of the salient points raised in proof of Louise Michel's

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homosexual tendencies.

Now, what are these points?

First, Louise Michel was an exceptional child, eager for knowledge and scientific problems, and a vociferous reader. Second, her playthings ~~are~~ ~~it~~ unlike those of other girls, were not dolls, but frogs, beetles, mice and other living things. Third, Louise Michel played with her cousin (by the way, this would prove that Louise was a perfectly normal girl), otherwise she would have chosen girls for her companions), climbed trees, inaugurated hunting expeditions, romped and was altogether full of boyish pranks and mischief. Fourth, she grew up very indifferent to appearance, hated and opposed feminine frills, corsets, high heels and the rest, was terribly negligent about herself and disorderly in her habits and in her surroundings. Fifth, Louise Michel was extraordinarily courageous, lacking in the elements of fear, daring to the point of recklessness and her power of endurance through physical suffering was hardly equalled by men. Sixth, no man had been in her life except ~~in the relationship and of~~ as comrades~~hip~~. On the other hand, she was always surrounded "with passionately loved" women friends. Last, but not least, Louise Michel was a mathemtician and a composer, loved sculpture, enthused over Wagner, and did ever so many other things which women never have done. ~~I might add that~~ The author lays great stress on Louise Michel's angular figure, flatness of chest, and ~~the~~ masculine features. In short, he brings forth every imaginable argument to prove the masculinity of Louise Michel, arguments used from time memorial by all sorts of men against woman whenever she attempted to rise out of the position of the harem inmate, and to achieve an equal place in life with man.

Let us see how true all these so-called facts are.

First, the early proclivities of Louise Michel for the deep problems of life, her reading of serious books and her mathematical sense, have been part of the make-up of quite a number of great women; to mention only a few, Sonia Kavalevskya, Mary Baskertchev, and, in modern times, Madame ~~Currie~~ Curré. Kavalevskya solved serious mathematical problems at the age of eight, and became, when she was barely twenty-five, one of the greatest mathematicians of the time. Baskertchev had a far deeper psychologic understanding for her

Dorian La Page

surroundings than a great many men; she occupied herself with the study of science, sociology, literature, art, music, when she was ten years of age, and became one of the most remarkable figures of her time. Madame Curré is too well known, not merely as a help-mate of her husband, but as an independent authority in science, ~~to go into the value to the world~~. Yet these ~~these~~ women, and quite a number outside of them, were not only not homosexual, but were extremely feminine; this femininity was, to a large extent, the great tragedy in their lives, for the men they met were unable to grasp the yearning spirit of these women for the love and the comradeship ofthe man. Thus, Sonia Kavalevskaya wasted her substance with her husband, and later in a violent passion for a compatriot of hers, who never suspected the ~~xxlxxxfxx~~ flame that was consuming this great woman of the 19th Century. I have no desire to go into the private life of Madame Curré. She probably would consider it an imposition; but as much as is known of her private life, she seems to be eminently feminine and have no homosexual proclivities whatsoever.

Perhaps she suffered the same fate in her private life for her genius

I am quite sure that Frhr. von Levetzow has never seen healthy, normal American girls at play. He would find that they can romp, climb trees, play with frogs, beetles and snakes, and do all sorts of so-called "boyish" things, and yet grow up to be very frivolous, typically feminine, and ~~the~~ often useless women. On the other hand, there are any number of great American women, almost in every walk of life, who were very boyish in their childhood, and who yet are great lovers of men, mothers of children, and at the same time, a great moral force in the different movements for ~~the emancipation of America from slavery~~ a deeper or finer social value in their country. Louise's courage, reckless daring, lack of fear, and power of physical endurance, certainly I will not gainsay her in all that. But it would be unfair to the great host of Russian revolutionary women if I were to emphasize all the wonderful traits of Louise without giving them credit for theirs. It is evident that the author of the article has never come across these women, to mention but a few: Perovskaya, Helfman, Figner, Breskovskaya, Kavalskaya, Volkenstein, and of the later period, Apirdonova. All these women have been heroic in the great revolutionary struggle of Russia. They committed the most -

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daring deeds and went to their death or to the still greater calvary, Siberia and Katorga with a smile on their face. Yet Perovskaya preferred to die at the gallows with her ~~beloved husband~~ rather than to escape to safety which she could very easily have done. Helfman and Figner were so eminently feminine that they suffered more from the lack of beauty and delicacy which goes to make up a sensitive woman's life than they did from the physical horrors of the prison. Kavalskaya continued her rebellious struggle all through the years of imprisonment--something like twenty-two years. Volkenstein and Figner were among the most ~~xxxxxxx~~ beautiful women, physically, feminine in their love life and in their associations. Spridonova, ~~was~~ subjected to the most fiendish tortures, including outrage by drunkard Russian officers; her ~~xxxxx~~ naked body was burned with lighted cigars, but never a sound could be heard from her. Yet Spridonova is a delicate and frail little person, deeply in love with her comrade, and altogether as sensitive as a flower. These few examples should suffice to convince anyone not steeped in sectarianism or in the old threadbare notions of the nature of woman, of the fact that one can be very much of a woman and at the same time a great rebel and fighter. ~~So, too, Louise Michel was great as a rebel and idealist, and yet remained a woman.~~ However, I might go on ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ enumerating women in every country, every age and every clime, who ~~took their place~~ stood side by side with the men in the great struggles for human right and for their own emancipation, who were certainly as brave and daring, as their comrades ~~or ever heroes~~, and yet had nothing whatever of masculinity or homosexuality in them.

This brings me to the absurd conclusion which von Levetzow draws from the tragic grandeur of the last meeting between Dombrovsky and Louise Michel on the barricades. The author is so limited in his masculine conceptions of woman that he cannot understand how two such people, in the face of the collapse of the cause they loved more than life itself, would meet like comrades. He remarks "if Dombrovsky had seen the woman in Louise, he would have patted her ~~on the~~ cheek;as it is, he stretched out both his hands, and grasped hers in a last farewell". I am surprised that a man of von Levetzow's sensitiveness could be capable of such vulgarity. I rather think it is his ignorance of the wonderful relation which existed and still exist between men

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and women who are engaged in the fight for an ideal, or who have a common cause. It is true that very often the consciousness of the difference of sex is obliterated between them; they are comrades, capable of the highest sacrifice for each other and devotion to each other. Here again I would have to name ~~merely~~ every country and every clime that has given to the world such beautiful comradeship between men and women, but space will not permit. I merely raise this point to emphasize the absurdity of the arguments of the author on "Louise Michel".

Louise Michel hated woman's frills and the rest of the requisite which goes to make up the unfortunate hot-house plant of a perverted society, and that she was careless and disorderly. As far as the first so-called argument is concerned, I must enlighten von Levetzow. ~~It is quite true that a great many~~ I do know that many women ~~who~~ have emancipated themselves from the shame of the past have also developed ~~a new conception of beauty and fitness of attire~~; but have yet retained a sense of beauty. But in most cases, it was a just protest against the rags, the waste and the stupidity of the whole paraphenalia which went to make up the ordinary woman's outfit. From a scientific, a sociological and a moral point of view, these women have ~~xxxxx~~ insisted that the mark of enslavement for their sex has been her clothes, and that she can not really be free unless she transvalues the value of the things which held her in bondage. Are these women, therefore, homosexual? No more than Louise has been. Louise, who dedicated her life to the cause of humanity, who not only was engaged in the struggle for existence for her mother and herself, but was foremost in the movement which absorbed most of her thoughts and all her energies. Was she to spend hours before the mirror, exploit dressmakers and torture salesgirls in a vain pursuit of the latest styles, and must she, therefore, be considered an Urning because she dressed sensibly and paid very little attention to what is commonly called the beauties ~~and comforts of life~~ of woman's ~~dress~~ appearance. Verily, if the author had no better proof ~~is~~ for his claim, he should have refrained from making out his case.

~~It is true that~~ Louise Michel had an angular figure, ~~that~~ she had masculine features. It is not true, as the author will have it, that she had a masculine voice. I heard her speak when she was 66 years of

age; her voice was a beautiful contralto, deep and melodious, and went straight to the heart of her hearers. With that was a remarkable simplicity which explains the great power she had over her audiences. As to her face, it is clear to me that von Levetzow never saw Louise smile. If he had done so he would no longer have seen the male in her. It is known to all those who were close to Louise Michel what an illuminating effect her smile and her beautiful eyes created. This argument, too, seems very lame. of von Levetzow

However, we come to the most important contention, ~~which if really true might prove for Louise Michel's sex differentiation.~~ The author relates the fact that Louise repulsed two suitors because she was not attracted to men. It is significant, however, that this happened when she was 12 and 13 years of age, and the men were old enough to be her fathers; besides that, they came to buy her. She, herself, expresses her indignation and repulsion against such men, on page 330. Also her attitude towards the marriage institution is very significant. page 332 Louise resents marriage without love, as every self-respecting woman would. But nowhere in her writings has she expressed opposition to love without marriage. Nor has she ever written about the necessity of announcing from the housetops that so intimate and private an experience as the love life between two people should become common property. Proof for that is the following:

Louise Michel had a love experience with a teacher when she, herself, was quite a young girl, and was supporting herself as a teacher. Later, after her return from New Caledonia, she lived for a time with a Belgian comrade of hers. And if she did not have more experiences of that sort, it is probably because, as she herself stated, ~~she has given her~~ Dark given her heart to the Revolution. Yes, that was Louise's lover. All her life she was dedicated to that love. Types like Louise Michel can have no personal love which in any way interferes with their one great passion for an ideal, and Louise's passion for her ideal was the most over-powering element in her life, and went with her to her grave.

It is true she had a number of women friends whom she loved, not in the way von Levetzow will have it. A great many modern women who have little of the personal love in their lives, attach themselves

in comradeship and devoted friendship with their own sex, just as great men do. The reason for that, in the case of the women, is that they find better understanding with members of their own sex than they do with the men of their time. The fact of the matter is that the modern man is still very much in the skin of his forebear, Adam, not very much different in his attitude towards woman than the average man. On the other hand, the modern woman is no longer satisfied with merely the lover; she wants understanding, comradeship, she wants to be treated as a human being, and not as an object for sex gratification. Since she cannot always find it in the man, she turns to her own sisters. It is precisely because there is no sex element between them that they can better understand each other. In other words, instead of being attracted to her women friends by her homosexual tendencies, Louise was attracted to them because she was very much the woman, and needed the companionship of women. Then there was in Louise the mother instinct. She was passionately fond of children, mothered every waif she could pick up; it was her mother love which prompted her to adopt Charlotte Vauwell, to bring her up and share with her out ofher meagre earnings. Never at any time was Charlotte even in the spiritual sense the sweetheart of Louise Michel. The fact of the matter is that Louise paid dearly for her devotion to Charlotte. The latter, together with her brother, made the last years of Louise Michel very miserable. They kept her a prisoner to a large extent, never letting her alone to receive her friends or to live with them. Charlotte opened Louise's mail and watched her constantly. The reason for it is that both Charlotte and her brother lived off Louise Michel and were mortally afraid that anyone else might benefit by the great generosity of Louise. In any event, it is ridiculous to point to Charlotte Vauwell as the sweetheart of Louise Michel.

As to the proof for sexuality in Louise Michel's love sculpture and her appreciation of Wagner: Von Levetzow will have it that no woman is capable of creative art and music. He graciously admits that Francisco Holmés, the French-Scandinavian woman, was a great composer. But he hastens to add that, according to her photograph, she looks masculine. I do not think that it is worth

while to go into this argument. The fact that there were only a few great women composers does not make them homosexual. They are simply pioneers in the domain so far not explored by many women. As to the love of Wagner, the truth is that more women attend Wagnerian music and understand him than men. Perhaps it is because the elemental untrammeled spirit of Wagner's music affects the women as the releasing force of the pent-up, stifled and hidden emotions of their souls. It is hardly necessary to bring forth the truth that women are not only capable of the appreciation of sculpture, but that there are quite a number of women sculptors of no small merit.

There is one thing in which I quite agree with von Levetzow: it is when he says that Louise Michel was so inseparably wound up with Anarchism that to grasp her personality and her complex nature, one must also go into a discussion of her social philosophy. But, as he justly says, the Jahrbuch is not the place to do so. But even if it were, I do not think that the author would have been in a position to undertake an analysis of Anarchism, since he seems to know absolutely nothing about it. Else, how is one to understand his interpretation on page 315,(line 4 to 7), What an insult to the memory of Louise Michel and the intelligence of the readers of the Jahrbuch!

I have known Louise Michel for a number of years. Long before I met her I knew her ideas and the price she had paid in the struggle for them. Her fortitude, her martyrdom, and more than that her boundless love for humanity, were to me like a purifying and illuminating flame. I met her the first time in London in 1896; I was frequently with her then, and learned from her the story of the heroic struggle of the Paris Commune. Louise never spoke of herself and her own part in that struggle.

I met her again in 1899, London then in 1901 when for the first time in many years Louise Michel came back to Paris. It was during both periods that I had the opportunity to be much with her, and to receive from her a few snatches of her life, as it was my intention to write her Biography. But she was so morbidly reticent about everything pertaining to herself that she would loathe to discuss her own life. Always, however, she would become radiant, her face would light up

by a divine fire when she would come to speak of others; Her comrades, whom she nursed and cared for in New Caledonia; or, if she would speak of dumb creatures. For among other traits of Louise Michel was her great sympathy for animals. The little cottage she lived in in London was a perfect menagerie of stray cats and dogs that she picked up at night on her way home. Especially, her love for cats was certainly anything but masculine. ~~It is true that~~ Pedro von Levetzow relates the fact that Louise, standing on the barricades and surrounded by bullets, rescued a cat which had pressed close to the wall in ~~mortal~~ terrified haste fright. History has never yet mentioned any man who, in time of danger, would do such a thing. I don't mean to say that he would not rescue a child or even a dog; but certainly never a cat.

The so-called masculine Louise Michel, who was disorderly, and could do nothing to keep herself ~~in~~ tidy, in short, who was not domestic, yet learned to knit, darn, wash and cook for her fellow exiles in New Caledonia, besides nursing them with a tenderness of her great mother heart, and to keep up their spirit when the dreadful condition of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ their lives would overcome them.

I remember one wonderful evening in Paris. Anarchist friends of ours arranged a little dinner party for Louise and invited me to it. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Louise, dressed in her usual black, with only a white lace collar and cuffs to give it relief, her face flushed ~~xxxxx~~ like the roses on the table, and framed by her curly silvery hair, was radiant with the joy of being back in the city of her dreams and her struggles, and surrounded by intimate comrades. She was more talkative than I had ever heard her before, more willing to let us look into her soul. Never ~~before, or that evening~~ a moment, did Louise show even the remotest masculine characteristic or homosexual tendencies. I am sure that they would not have escaped me had there been anything of that in Louise Michel for, as I said, in the beginning of my article, I have made a study of all the best literature on homosexuality, had known many homosexuals and ~~xxxxxxx~~ easily detected homosexual leanings in people. There was no trace of that in Louise Michel.

~~Besides that, I have the testimony of the great friends~~ And among her friends the greatest man of her time of Louise Michel, Peter Kropotkin, Malatesta, Malato, ~~Hermann~~, Rocker, Elisée Reclus

Some of them ~~lived~~ lived close to her, were almost in daily contact. Had there been only the slightest indication of homosexuality, they would have seen it; it would certainly have been known among her comrades. I have recently spoken to my friend and comrade, Rudolf Rocker, about this phase treated in the article of von Levetzow. He, too, assured me that never at any time has any one of the intimate friends of Louise Michel seen the slightest indication of homosexual leanings ~~or heard of such a thing.~~ I might say in passing that Rudolf Rocker, like myself, is perfectly free of any prejudice towards homosexuals. Our only desire is to prove Louise Michel as she really was,..an exceptional woman, a great mind, and a wonderful spirit. She represented the new type of womanhood, yet as old as the race, as wise as time, and with a soul of an all-embracing and all-understanding love for mankind. ~~Ifxxxxx~~ In short, a complete woman, freed from the prejudice nd the tradition which for centuries past have held woman in bondage and have condemned her to the position of a domestic and sexual slave. In Louise Michel there has risen the new woman who is capable of the most heroic deeds, yet at the same time remains the woman in her passion and love life.

Dear Dr. Hirschfeld, I have attempted in as concise a manner as possible, to analyse critically the contentions of Frhr. von Levetzow's. You will agree with me, I am sure, that neither the question of ~~xxx~~ homosexuality or of the homosexuals can gain anything by a misstatement of facts. For this reason, I have undertaken to prove the errors in the article, and for no other reason. I hope you will find my criticism convincing and that you will not only, as you have kindly offered, publish my reply, but will also take off the photograph of Louise Michel from your gallery of Urnings.

Faithfully,

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Lauer Nick

a Resolution addressed

to Dr Magnus Hirschfeld

Berlin 1923.